

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH
MAJOR GENERAL WINFIELD SCOTT, DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF
FOR STRATEGIC EFFECTS, MULTINATIONAL FORCE IRAQ
(VIA TELECONFERENCE)

LOCATION: THE PENTAGON, ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

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THIS IS A RUSH TRANSCRIPT.

MODERATOR: With us on the line, Major General Winfield Scott, deputy chief
of staff for Strategic Effects, Multi-National Force Iraq.

Thank you, sir, for joining us, and welcome aboard.

GEN. SCOTT: Well, thank you, Jack.

I go by Skip and please feel free to call me Skip.

I've been in Baghdad now for three months. My background is airlift; however, here in the IEC, as the deputy director working for General (Caldwell ?), we have the political section and the economic section, along with the comms piece that Admiral Mark Fox works.

So I've been very involved with both the governorates and the economic development over the short time I've been here. Currently we're working, with the embassy, on the political side legislative laws that will promote the national reconciliation. I'm sure many of you are familiar with the hydrocarbon law, the constitutional review, Article 140, the disputed areas, the ongoing election legislation and de-Ba'ath.

From the economic development side of the house, our primary focus right now is budget execution with the government of Iraq. We're working closely with the Brinkley group. And I just returned from Amman late last night, a two-day visit with the United Nations. Probably it's been the first visit from the force to Amman in about a year, and discussing better ways that we, the force, can help the United Nations, and for us and them to have better visibility on the programs that we're currently conducting in Iraq to support their government.

So have at it. I'm ready.

MODERATOR: All right, sir.

Mark Finkelstein.

Q Good morning, General Scott, and thank you very much for being available to speak with us this morning.

Why don't I just ask you the -- you know, the sort bottom-line, most obvious question: How is the surge going?

GEN. SCOTT: The surge is going in a deliberate pace. If you listen to General Petraeus, we're making progress -- slow, deliberate progress in some areas. There are some areas that we need to work a little bit harder at, especially in the vehicle-borne IEDs.

The force is still moving in. The force won't be completely -- as far as the additional forces -- completely in-country until the end of May. But we are making progress. We have good days and we have days that are not as good. But overall, we're making slow, deliberate progress.

A real, true assessment probably won't be able to be done until mid- to late summer after all the forces are in and we've been able to conduct the operations in its entirety.

Q Thank you.

A quick follow up. You've identified vehicle-borne IEDs as one area where work remains to be done. What would you identify on the positive side as those areas in which we are seeing the slow, deliberate progress to which you refer?

GEN. SCOTT: Well, overall, sectarian violence has decreased. Overall, violence in the city of Baghdad has decreased. What has increased slightly is the spectacular bombings that the VBIDs entail when they are able to -- (audio break) --

Q (In progress following audio break) -- willing to bide their time? And wouldn't they just wait now and sort of lull us into a false sense of security, and then we start to phase out anyhow, and then go on the attack? Why don't they do that?

GEN. SCOTT: Well, Tom, I can tell you this, that the coalition and the government of Iraq's forces remains focused and determined on the mission. We're going to do -- we're going to carry out the mission regardless of the discussion that's being focused back in the United States on the timelines. Really, as a military officer, you know, that's a discussion that I'm not going to get involved with certainly.

Q I guess I was just wondering why, you know -- since obviously we've seen the bombings and some of the upscale in bombings. You know, if they were really just willing to bide their time and wait, I mean, why isn't that a tactic that they're using now so that, you know, if things were calm and stable, it would be easier for us to pull out than to stay in? I mean, right now it seems like, though, the more violence that occurs, the more we don't have a choice but to stay and try to help.

GEN. SCOTT: Well, Tom, Skip Scott's belief is that every day the government of Iraq becomes stronger -- their government and their security forces -- and they become more determined every day. Every bombing that takes place they become even more determined.

Last week, after the Council of Representatives, the suicide bomber went in, a weak government would not have met the next day, but the Council of Representatives met in full session the next day and declared their full support against the terrorist activities. And this government here in Iraq is determined to continue to prosecute this war against the terrorists and the insurgents.

Q Thank you, sir.

MODERATOR: Charlie Quidnunc, you're next.

Q Yes, General. This is Charlie Quidnunc at the Whizbang Blog.

One of the things that seem so important in Washington is the passage of the law -

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GEN. SCOTT: Charlie, could you speak up? I can barely hear you.

Q Sorry about that.

One of the questions that I have is about, people in Washington are very concerned about parliament passing some laws on oil revenue sharing and de-Ba'athification reform and constitutional modifications. What are the political forces that are holding up that process in the legislature there? And what are the coalitions and what are their positions, and why can't they be passed?

GEN. SCOTT: Well, there are several key laws that are being drafted or are potentially going to be looked at by the Council of Representatives here in the next couple of months. Each of them has a direct impact on the national reconciliation -- you know, the hydrocarbon legislation, as I mentioned; the Article 140; the constitutional review; the election legislation; and the de-Ba'ath reform.

These are -- these are huge legislative actions of very significant importance. And we need to understand that the Council of Representatives has been an acting body for 11 months. And they moving very slowly forward on this legislation, but for any government that's only been in formation for this short of a period, I commend them for the progress that they've made.

No doubt there's a lot of work that needs to be done on each of these legislation items, and it's not going to be easy. But we're working hard with them on all of them, and specifically the hydrocarbon legislation and the de-Ba'athification reform. They will all have significant impact to the national reconciliation and it needs to be done correctly.

Q What was the other one, Article 140?

GEN. SCOTT: That is the disputed areas in northern Iraq. Sometimes you hear phrases "the Kirkuk referendum." It's the look at the boundaries between the pre-Saddam era and when Saddam redrew the boundaries, and then the current boundaries that Kurdistan currently has.

Q We hear about -- (inaudible) -- but are there other groups or parties that are also holding things up? Or it's just a --

GEN. SCOTT: There's no specific party that's holding it up. It's the normal process of sitting down together and reconciling their views.

For example, on the hydrocarbon, the revenue sharing is still in draft and they're in much discussion, but the discussion is centered around the percentage of revenues that will go to the different provinces. There's nine provinces in Iraq, and how they come up with the right percentage of what revenues go where will be critical to the future development.

MODERATOR: Okay. Thank you, sir.

And Strife (sp) next.

Q Good morning, sir. This is Strife (sp) from Red State. I've got a -- questions about the transfer of authority to the Iraqi government in the various provinces. I understand that the province of Maysan was handed over last week and some others are getting very close to being handed over.

GEN. SCOTT: That's correct. Maysan was handed over last week.

Q The best information that I have -- and this -- once again, this goes back about four or five months -- was that -- and you got to forgive my pronunciation here because I went to school in Southside, Virginia and we didn't do a lot of Arabic there -- Qadisiyah and Nineveh provinces are scheduled to be turned over fairly soon?

GEN. SCOTT: Charlie, I don't have the exact dates for the --

Q Oh, not talking about the dates. I'm just talking about sequencing.

GEN. SCOTT: I believe that's correct, but I don't have that sequence in front of me. I'm sorry.

Q What exactly does that mean to our operations when a province is just, you know, transitioned over to Iraqi -- the Iraqi government?

GEN. SCOTT: It essentially means, Charlie, that that province's security -- and from a provincial government point of view it is led by the Iraqi government in the province.

Q And do we still have -- do we still carry out military operations in those provinces?

GEN. SCOTT: We're still embedded with the Iraqi forces, but they have to lead.

Q I guess the second part to that is, are you -- I'm taking that you're familiar with what's going on in the British zone also?

GEN. SCOTT: Yes, I am.

Q I'm --

GEN. SCOTT: Basra.

Q I have a question about the handover a day or so ago of the British base Ashaba (ph).

GEN. SCOTT: Charlie, I'd have to get back to you on Ashaba (ph).

Q Right. Like I say, my question is, as I understand it, that has been and remains or has been a critical way station on the MSR coming up from Kuwait. And I was wondering what impact we see that having on our operations if a major way station and a place where security patrols were based out of is now in the -- has now been turned over to the Iraqi army instead of being held by the Brits.

GEN. SCOTT: Charlie, I don't have the specifics on that way station. I know that we would not hand over that -- the infrastructure or that responsibility if we didn't think that the minister of Defense could pick up that responsibility, and I feel fairly confident that -- I'm very confident that the government of Iraq can and will pick up that responsibility.

Q Okay. That's all I have. Thanks very much, sir.

MODERATOR: Okay. Sean Meane (ph)?

Q I'm going to pass my question at this point, Jack.

MODERATOR: Okay. Thanks, Sean.

Anybody else online that has not had a chance to ask a question?

Q Well, I've showed up, Jack. Austin Bay (ph).

The question that I had I think was the first one basically that Mark Finkelstein suggested, but General Scott who demurred on, because I'm really curious. Strategic influence is one of your jobs, and I see a lot of strategic influence coming from Washington. But, General Scott, I guess I will take one other try at this to see if there's a way to ask it that a senior military officer could answer, and this is the way I will ask it. In your opinion, who do the Iraqi people listen to as the leading voice in the United States? Who do they listen to for guidance of what the American people are going to do or what the American presence -- about the American presence in Iraq?

GEN. SCOTT: You know, that's a great question.

Q (Inaudible) -- the way I ask it. I didn't ask it for a shot at Senator Reid; I asked who do they listen to.

GEN. SCOTT: No, no, I understand completely. I think they listen to our president, who is our leader.

Q Why do you say that, sir? Is there any -- do you have an indication of it, or is that a gut read? Do you have a -- do you have feedback from Iraqis that say that's who they listen to?

GEN. SCOTT: Austin, it's a gut feel because I have not asked that question to my Iraqi counterparts.

Q Well, I tell you what; I did sort of ask that when I was on active duty there, sir. And yes, I sort of; it was done anecdotally. And I think that was one of the voices they certainly listened to. But I would be curious -- and I know that your schedule is helter-skelter and once you're finished here with us you got other things to do, but I would like some follow-up on that, if you don't mind.

GEN. SCOTT: I could do that, Austin.

Q Who is the American opinion leader among the Iraqi people? That's the way I --

GEN. SCOTT: I could do that for you.

Q Would you do that? Thank you, sir.

GEN. SCOTT: You bet.

And Jack, I'll get back to you on that answer so that you can make sure Austin gets it.

MODERATOR: All right, sir, will do. I can do that.

And as we're rolling down here, are there any --

Q Second-round question, if possible.

MODERATOR: Right. We got a few minutes here left, so any follow-ups?

Q General, it's Mark Finkelstein again from NewsBusters.

I know that you don't want to comment on political matters, and I certainly respect that. But I'm asking for a reaction from you as a military man, as somebody with more than 30 years in our military, to the following. Senator McCain very recently appeared on "The Daily Show" with Jon Stewart, and he joked about -- you know, I guess Jon Stewart was giving him a bit of a hard time, and Senator McCain joked that he had something picked out for you: a nice little IED to put under your desk. And thereafter, Congressman Murtha went on the floor of the House of Representatives, and he seemed to be furious, and he criticized the fact that Senator McCain had joked about an IED and demanded an apology. And I saw Senator McCain on "Good Morning America" this

morning and he was asked about it. He said, "I don't know how to react to that. On a comedy show I'm going to use humor."

And then here's the part where I would ask you to comment. He said, "When I was in combat in tough situations, we used humor all the time." So as a military man in Iraq subject to IEDs, are you offended by the fact that Senator McCain joked about an IED?

GEN. SCOTT: Mark, I'd rather not comment on that. Every day coalition forces are killed or injured by IEDs. It's a very dangerous matter here.

MODERATOR: All right. Thank you very much, General, for joining us this afternoon -- or this morning, excuse me; afternoon your time, morning our time. And we appreciate it, and thank you all for calling in and joining us.

Q Thanks for organizing this, Jack.

MODERATOR: You bet, sir.

Q Hey Jack, can you be sure that we all get an answer to Austin's comment?

MODERATOR: Sure. Yep.

Q I really would appreciate it. I think that's something that is -- I think it's something that'd be -- it's a good thing to at least talk about. It gives us a little different approach than what you hear out of Washington.

Q And Jack, if you could also, could you try to get the follow-up from General Scott on the issue of the provincial handovers and some of the sequencing there? Because this is obviously one of the big benchmarks. I think that a lot of people -- I know that I'm looking at for what's going on, much more so than the daily bean counting of who attacked who.

MODERATOR: Right.

Q And what impact that is going to have as the southern provinces stop being in the hands of, you know, a trusted ally and start -- and the whole MSR becomes more and more of an Iraqi security operation.

MODERATOR: Okay. I will do that because -- and some of this we have been tracking on Defenselink. There are some -- the presentations on there concerning the handover and the progress and the processes that are involved in that, but -- and we probably -- we should be updating that also. But I will forward that question on and we will get a response back.

Q Okay. Thanks so much for putting this together, Jack.

MODERATOR: You bet.

Q Okay.

Q Thanks.

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